

LARVAL CASES OF *INCURVARIA PECTINEA* HAWORTH (LEP.: INCURVARIIDAE) ON WOOD ANTS' NESTS — The following observations were made while on a walk round the Nature trail in the Glen Nant Forest Nature Reserve on 24th July 1987. It was a fine sunny day, ideal for the Open day that was in progress at the reserve in aid of the European Year of the Environment, and as a result the Wood Ants' nests were a hive of activity. While watching the comings and goings at one nest I became aware that some of the particles of debris forming the surface of the nest were in fact the bivalved larval cases of *Incurvaria pectinea* Haw. Closer inspection showed that there were no fewer than 14 cases of this species on the nest and all were being trampled over by the many voracious worker ants. In idle curiosity I picked up one of the cases and was surprised to find that it still contained a living larva. The nearest birch tree was some 15 feet from the nest and on inspection was found to have some of its lower leaves perforated by the characteristic oval holes left by the larvae of *I. pectinea* cutting out their first case after their initial period as leaf-miners. Furthermore directly beneath these leaves one of the dead Birch leaves on the ground contained a clean oval hole where a larva had subsequently cut out an oval of dead leaf to form one side of its bivalved case — the source of the cases was thus obvious.

Careful inspection of some 6 other wood ants' nests in close proximity to birch trees revealed that on 4 no larval cases of *pectinea* were to be seen but on the other two there was one and 10 cases respectively. Just over half of the cases examined still contained living larvae. The nature of the debris used by the different ant colonies in the construction of their nests was very variable and not simply dependent on what material was at hand — thus on one nest dead oak buds predominated while on another dead birch catkins were a major component. Thus selectivity of nest material by the ants may account for the presence of *pectinea* cases on only a few nests while *pectinea* larvae probably occurred close to all the nests judging by the abundance of characteristically perforated leaves.

I would be interested to know how widespread this hazard for *I. pectinea* larvae is. Or is it a hazard? It would appear that their bivalved cases are adequate protection against the ants and at night the larvae could safely emerge and feed on the leaf debris brought to the nest by the ants. Which parasitic hymenopteran is going to search for and attack a larva in the midst of a crowd of Wood Ants? Most parasitica appear to be primarily active during the daylight hours. All speculation of course but this could be an example of commensalism in the making. — K. P. BLAND, 35 Charterhall Road, Edinburgh EH9 3HS.